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SUBJECT: Pingtung County Magistrate Election Countdown

REF: Taipei 4355

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11. (SBU) Both sides express optimism about the December 3 election based on conflicting polls carried out by party operatives in Pingtung County's green and blue camps. While KMT officials would not reveal specific numbers, they told AIT/K KMT candidate Wang Chin-shih has maintained a comfortable lead in their polls throughout the close race. A DPP campaign assistant in charge of polling and promotional activities told AIT/K DPP candidate Tsao Chi-hung leads in internal polls by 5 percent. Based on these results the DPP predicts Tsao will win the election by ten thousand votes (there are 160,000 eligible voters in Pingtung County).

12. (SBU) Although independent candidate Soong Li-hua's support continues to hover at 10 percent despite ongoing vote-buying charges and indictments (see reftel), both KMT and DPP officials expect that the "dump and protect effect" (chi-pao) will take place. They anticipate that the vast majority of votes for Soong Li-hua will disappear on the morning of December 3, going instead in an even-split between DPP and KMT.

13. (SBU) The KMT remains extremely cautious about potential DPP campaign tricks and is trying to put out any fires as they arise. Both parties have their heavyweights campaigning locally by walking or parading in the street this week. President Chen was in Pingtung on the afternoon of the November 29, when AIT/K visited the city. Ma Ying-jeou, Wu Dun-yi, and Wang Jyn-ping have also visited the county for the KMT in the last two weeks.

14. (SBU) The KMT stated they hoped to keep the last week of the campaign calm and cool. They don't want to emphasize any party issues or arouse inter-party strife. Their hope is to not engender any sense of crisis that will rile green voters and thus push them to the polls. On the other hand, the DPP said its last few days is concentrated on whipping up three kinds of voters who may stay away from the polls: first - voters who are confident that the DPP candidate will win and may not vote; second - voters who support the DPP but are so disappointed by DPP corruption scandals they are not motivated to vote; and, third - soft-hearted voters who are easily sympathetic to a weak candidate and may throw their votes to a tearful Soong Li-hua. Both parties remain convinced voter turnout will decide this election.

15. (SBU) Comment: This race remains too close to call. Although internal party polls are usually good indicators of the real direction of the race, neither side could present conclusive evidence or display even enough bravado about their polls to indicate to AIT/K that they have a firm lead. End comment.

THIELE

PAAL